

We All Need To Help Make The Connection

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Recently, I visited the Blount County Farm Tour at Dr. Dick Daugherty's farm. There, approximately 500 fourth-graders from local schools had the opportunity to visit 17 talks and hands-on activities about agriculture. Farmers and other professionals explained where food comes from and how it is produced. The speakers covered topics such as cattle, swine, sheep, goat, poultry and milk production. About 65 such farm days have been conducted in Tennessee the past year with the help of county Farm Bureaus and county cattle and livestock associations.

Only about 2 percent of the population is engaged in producing food and fiber for the rest of the country and part of the world, so few people are living on or visiting a farm. Fewer families are staying on the farm and the number of people available to support agriculture in various agribusinesses and government jobs is dwindling. Since fewer people have farm-related experience, many do not understand routine production practices, especially those related to animal agriculture. The connection between a cow and hamburger might come naturally to some, but it is not a given to a larger and larger portion of our population.

The Blount County Farm Tour and similar events help bridge the gap between production agriculture and food and fiber. Agriculture in the Classroom, managed in this state by the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, is a similar program. This past year 1,100 Tennessee teachers received training and teaching materials to inform students about production agriculture and how it relates to the food and fiber we all need and use. Information about the program is available from county Farm Bureau offices or online at www.agclassroom.org.

Another reason those in production agriculture need to make the connection: many organizations discourage consumption of beef or other animal products. Some of these groups produce materials for students which depict animal agriculture in an unfavorable light. Also, an increasing number of consumers are choosing a rural lifestyle, producing their own food, and seeking locally produced food. While that may be a trend, it will be very difficult to feed our country on that basis. The efficiencies of production agriculture allow others to live in town, large or small, and have others produce the food and fiber they use. Δ

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